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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002840

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: LEFTISTS JOIN OPPOSITION MOVES AGAINST ARROYO

REF: A. MANILA 2777

[B](#). MANILA 2731

[C](#). MANILA 2730

[D](#). MANILA 2689

[E](#). MANILA 1988

Classified By: Political Officer Timothy Cipullo
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Leftist groups, most of which are aligned with the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), appear to be lining up with mainstream opposition elements in efforts to unseat President Arroyo. Leftist groups, which have the ability to turn out protesters, are planning to join upcoming anti-Arroyo rallies. Student leftist groups are also becoming increasingly active. So far, there is no sign that the NPA is increasing the tempo of its guerrilla attacks. While the left's activities are potentially a headache for Arroyo, it remains unclear how closely leftists will be able to work with pro-Estrada and other opposition elements in forming a joint movement. In addition, there is little sign as of yet that Filipinos are prepared to join anti-government demonstrations on a large-scale basis. End Summary.

Left Plans Non-Violent Action

[2](#). (C) Leftist groups, most of which are aligned with the CPP/NPA, appear to be lining up with mainstream opposition elements in efforts to unseat President Arroyo. Teodoro "Teddy" Casino, a congressman representing Bayan Muna, a key leftist party, told poloff on June 16 that his party was working closely with other leftist groups "to force" a change in the government. Casino said Bayan Muna was convinced that Arroyo had become extremely vulnerable due to recent disclosures related to taped presidential conversations and "jueteng" (illegal gambling) (see reftels). Underscoring USG support for the rule of law and the welfare of the Filipino people, poloff urged that Bayan Muna work constructively within the system, and not undermine democracy and stability. Casino insisted that his party and its allies would work peacefully: "We will not support a violent change in government."

Upcoming Rallies

[3](#). (C) Casino added that the left was actively encouraging rallies and demonstrations that it hoped would culminate in a new "people power" movement that would displace Arroyo. He also confirmed that the left remained open to "tactical" alliances with other opposition groups in planning anti-Arroyo events. Contacts have confirmed that leftist groups are planning to join upcoming anti-Arroyo rallies. A planned June 24 rally will attempt to join leftist groups and mainstream opposition elements associated with former president Joseph Estrada, former presidential candidates Senator Panfilo "Ping" Lacson and Brother Eddie Villanueva, and others. Contacts have confirmed that the June 24 rally will include leftist "party list" groups, such as Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Gabriela (which represents women), and Kilosang Mayo Uno (KMU -- a militant trade union). Longtime activist priest Father Joe Dizon, who is helping to link the left and other opposition elements, confirmed to poloff on June 20 that the combined effort was "driven by common feeling that the truth of the 2004 election should come out." Dizon said the organizers were expecting a very broad "front" of "over 20,000" to assemble peacefully at the same spot in downtown Manila where a similar June 11 rally fizzled after an uninspiring turnout of fewer than 5,000 people (see ref B). Dizon told poloff that additional rallies were planned in the July timeframe.

Student Left Active

[4](#). (C) Student leftist groups are also becoming increasingly active. Leftists at the University of the Philippines, who control the student council, and other GRP-funded colleges

and universities are effectively using the Internet and cell phone texting to broadcast anti-GMA messages. (Note: Compared to the situation at state-funded schools, students at Catholic and other private universities, such as Ateneo and La Salle, do not seem as active at this time.) These students have been particularly effective at distributing copies of the tapes, including a popular cell phone ring tone, on which President Arroyo appears to be engaged in discussions with an election official about the margin of her victory in the May 2004 election. Students have also held small anti-government rallies at several universities. Leftist students are also engaging in occasional "street theater" activities in and around Manila meant to generate anti-GMA publicity. Gilberto Teodoro, a pro-Arroyo congressman, told Acting Polcouns on June 20 that he had not seen students this active since the successful 2000-01 effort to remove Estrada.

No Uptick Seen in NPA Activities

15. (C) So far, there is no sign that the NPA -- the military/terrorist wing of the CPP -- is increasing the tempo of its guerrilla attacks in order to take advantage of Arroyo's troubles. One CPP/NPA website asserted that the current "Gloria-gate" scandal was part of the "continuing crisis of the ruling system" and repeated a traditional NPA call for the left to take actions "to weaken the Arroyo regime." CPP/NPA leader Jose Maria Sison -- in exile in the Netherlands -- and other party officials have not been quoted as indicating that any sort of armed offensive is imminent, however. Nonetheless, some contacts are concerned that the NPA may well increase its activities. Senator Ralph Recto recently told Acting Polcouns that he thought the NPA would probably ratchet up attacks in order to augment pressure on the Arroyo administration.

16. (C) At this point, Mission has not detected any activities beyond the usual consistent pattern of tit-for-tat incidents involving the NPA and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). A notable recent incident occurred June 12 in the province of Pampanga, located northwest of Manila, when a group of soldiers killed 14 members of a pro-NPA rebel group. In retaliation, on June 13, a group of some 20 NPA guerrillas killed at least nine AFP soldiers in an attack in Ilocos Sur Province which is located north of Manila. In Samar Island in the Central Philippines, AFP Major General Jovito Palparan announced that he had requested that reinforcements be moved to the region to counter NPA forces. Samar has long been a hotbed of the NPA insurgency.

Comment

17. (C) The left can bring protesters out on the street and its activities are a potential headache for Arroyo. It is unclear, however, how closely the left can work with pro-Estrada and other opposition elements. The two groups have very little in common, save for their anti-GMA views. Despite the political volatility that has erupted over the tapes and the jueteng allegations, the NPA has not demonstrated that it is capable, at least as of yet, of exploiting the situation to its advantage. Observers say that attacks in urban centers such as Manila would be a tripwire indicating a NPA attempt to ramp up the pressure. Malacanang appears to be adopting a wait-and-see strategy in the hope that its opponents' efforts run out of steam and, in any case, there is little sign thus far that Filipinos are prepared to join anti-government demonstrations on a large-scale basis.

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